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Prayer for Modern Man

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Contents

Chapter I	Where We Are - Man Come of Age	page 3
Chapter II	Commitment - Our Life of Prayer	page 21
Chapter III	Our Dialogue - Kinds of Prayer	page 38
Chapter IV	Our Dialogue in Action - Meditation	page 58
Chapter V	Discipline - The Backbone of Life and Prayer.....	page 77
Bibliography.....		page 92

Chapter I

Where We Are - Man Come of Age

No one today needs to be reminded that we are living in a most exciting and a most unique period of history. The majority of the people alive today have witnessed in their own lifetime greater technological advancement than was seen in all of the rest of human history. The rate of advancement and change has surpassed our comprehension. Things which were considered impossible thirty years ago are common occurrences today. So rapidly has our technology advanced that one hesitates to say anything is impossible or beyond human reach. We are steadily pushing back all the barriers which used to impress man with his limitedness and finiteness. Disease after disease is conquered; improvement after improvement in production is accomplished. Lives are saved in so many ways that even death does not seem to hold greater power than man; we are steadily increasing the life span to the point that one must honestly question if death really is inevitable. The fountain of youth issues from man's mind. Man is so mighty that even his world has become too small to contain him, and he pushes into outer space. And who is to say that even this galaxy can contain man? Is there no limit to his power?

It is no wonder that the cry goes up from every segment of our society, "man has come of age!" Man has become self-sufficient, and he no longer needs the crutches which used to support him against what seemed to be an external power. With the steady advancement of man, the gods have all retreated. As man's power has increased, he has usurped the realms which used to be con-

trolled by the gods. Their reign of fear and ignorance is over, and man's reign of security and knowledge has begun. Even the Christian God has retreated before science and technology. Christianity has more than once drawn up its Maginot Line beyond which it was claimed man could not advance. Yet man has found the Maginot Lines of Christianity to be as presumptuous and as ineffectual as the German armies found France's Maginot Line to be.

There was a time when a man's insecurity led him to believe in God; he recognized his own powerlessness in a world of greater forces than himself. Today a man's insecurity leads him to believe in man, not individual man but collective man (society); man has come to grips with the forces of the world, and he has proven himself the greatest force. His power increases steadily; there does not seem to be anything capable of checking or retarding man's advance. Man no longer needs to posit God to explain the unexplainable, for man is ever decreasing the unexplainable by his own knowledge and by his own talents. Man used to be held up as an example of powerlessness; God alone had power. Today it is man who is seen in power; there is no need for God. Man has become God. Over one hundred years ago, Ludwig Feuerbach concluded that man is God: "Man has his highest being, his God, in himself; not in himself as an individual, but in his essential nature, his species."¹ From Feuerbach's day to the present this assertion about man and about the nature of God has been

¹ Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. George Eliot, New York, 1957, 281.

made. In the realm of psychology it is reworked by Freud and a number of his followers. In the realm of economics and politics this assertion appears in Marx and his school. More recently it has appeared in theology developed by the "God is dead" theologians. When we look beneath the highly emotive and religious language of Thomas Altizer, for example, we find this humanism which found an early proponent in Feuerbach. It is dressed up differently, but the message is the same. "Man come of age" is God, because "man come of age" is not dependent on anyone or anything. The species of man is self-sufficient and self-perfecting.

The opinions which I have just recounted are some of the basic assumptions of one strand of twentieth century thought. This strand of thought appeals especially (though not solely) to those involved in technological pursuits. In technology, power is the key category, power is the pursuit. Technology is the daughter of science, and the primary difference between the daughter and her mother is that the daughter is intent on doing, on acting, whereas the mother has as her aim knowing and understanding. Technology always draws from pure science, but her primary interest is applying scientific knowledge in order to develop power. To disagree with the Greeks, therefore, knowledge is not power, although it may lead to power. There have been ages where man's primary aim was to know and understand; now we are living in an age when doing is of the greatest importance. Today, we are not primarily concerned with knowing

our world but with doing something about it. Of course, doing something about the world presupposes a knowledge of the world, but our modern science is almost entirely restricted to areas where the knowledge can then be applied toward doing. Even the social sciences today are touched heavily by the spirit of technology. Psychology and sociology are especially oriented toward doing. Even history, economics, and political theory stress those aspects which may help man to act wisely and properly. It is no accident that the history departments of our colleges are becoming ever increasingly oriented toward intellectual history; this is the history which shows us where we have been so that we may act, so that we may progress. There is very little study devoted to isolated historical data. Man is impatient to bring about a new world; he is oriented toward this goal. Behind this orientation lies the presupposition that man is capable of bringing in the new world by his own power.

To understand this presupposition of man's capabilities, I believe, we need only look at the history of technology. The history of technology is truly unique. Unlike political, economic, and social history, the history of western technology if shown in graph form would appear as a gradually rising line, leveling off in some periods, and in the twentieth century sky-rocketing clear off our graph. Similar graphs constructed for other areas of historical studies would show dips and declines and little, if any, rise. Economic history has its recessions and

depressions; in political history empires rise and fall; in social history classes develop and are overthrown. But in technological history there is only advance; furthermore, in modern times this advance has been stupendous (actually, I know of no adjective that can do justice to this situation). Is it any wonder that modern man has great faith in his abilities? From the technological standpoint, there have been no setbacks to man's advancements; there have been experimental failures, but these were the result of insufficient knowledge or inaccurate calculation. Experimental failures will be rectified in time. From a technological point of view, faith in man's ability remains unshaken. Man is God, and the term, "God," is only man's ideal of himself.

Before we accept the view of man as God, however, let us examine our present age a little further. Is man, in fact, as powerful as we have thus far presented him to be? Is he capable of solving all his problems and achieving security? We have said that technology has solved many of our problems, but we have not investigated to see if in solving these problems other problems have been born. What shall we say of the brutal effects that industrialization has had on human laborers? When we see our fellow men treated as machines, can we go on to call ourselves gods? We must face the depersonalization of society as a product of technological advancement. That same advancement which we laud has created cities in which millions of people are turned into ani-

mals. In our efforts to raise humanity to new heights we have too infrequently overlooked the broader implications of what we are doing. Technology enables us to save the lives of many who in an earlier time would have died, yet it also causes the loss of the lives of many (both physical life, mental, and spiritual life). Psychology has developed more effective methods of dealing with man's insecurity, yet our age ever increases the number of insecure people. "Technology is upsetting because it complicates the world....The whole business of living seems to become harder."² The great power which we have obtained brings with it great responsibility, and we have not been able to keep pace in the area of responsibility. As our power has increased so has the danger of error increased. Human errors can cost the lives for greater numbers of people today than ever before. This argument, while it may bring us down to earth and make us reflect on technological advancement, does not really speak to those who proclaim our "coming of age." After all, it is entirely possible that man in time will eradicate the problems caused by technology. While these facts may deny man's present omnipotence, they in no way deny what Feuerbach maintained: that man has the potentiality of becoming the God whom he projects.

While the arguments posed by current events and sociology may no seem to stand up against technology's claims, there are interesting studies being done on man in the field of natural

² Emmanuel G. Mesthene, "What Modern Science Offers the Church," Saturday Review, Nov. 19, 1966, 30.

science. One such study is On Agression by Konrad Lorenz. Lorenz studies agression and other social phenomenon in lower animals and then he turns his attention to man. Lorenz notes what we have already noted: "The danger to modern man arises not so much from his power of mastering natural phenonema as from his powerlessness to control sensibly what is happening today in his own society."³ He believes that most of our problems in this respect are fostered by our lack of understanding what man's nature really is. We have become so conscious of man's ability to acquire power that we tend to overlook his relationship to the rest of the world's creatures: "To regard man, the most ephemeral and rapidly evolving of all species, as the final and unsurpassable achievement of creation, especially at his present-day particularly dangerous and disagreeable stage of development, is certainly the most arrogant and dangerous of all untenable doctrines.... If I thought of man as the final image of God, I should not know what to think of God. But when I consider that our ancestors, at a time fairly recent in relation to the earth's history, were perfectly ordinary apes, closely related to chimpanzees, I see a glimmer of hope."⁴ One of the major points which Lorenz makes is that man cannot afford to forget that he is an animal, and his high development does not nullify the fact that like all animals he is subject to forces both within and outside of himself which

³ Konrad Lorenz, On Agression, trans. Marjory Wilson, New York, 1966, 223.

⁴ Ibid., 229.

have great power over him. In failing to recognize natural forces, man endangers himself and the world.

Lorenz is quick to point out that modern man tends to deny natural causality because it seems to threaten his free will. This is not the case, however: "Nobody can seriously believe that free will means that it is left entirely to the will of the individual, as to an irresponsible tyrant, to do or not to do whatever he pleases."⁵ Obviously, there are situations in which we act out of our natural predispositions in a similar way as do animals. Man's ability to think conceptually and his ability to speak have enabled him to advance to a very high degree. Yet, not all of man's mechanisms have advanced at the same rate, and this fact creates a great danger to man from himself. Lorenz notes that all heavily armed carnivores possess certain inhibitions which prevent the self-destruction of the species; animals who are physically capable of killing members of their own species with a single blow or thrust are inhibited naturally from so doing. These animals fight, even to the death, but they are prevented by nature from inflicting sudden death on each other. Man is not endowed with this inhibition, because without tools man cannot kill another man with a single blow or thrust. However, man has developed tools which can kill instantly.⁶ The problem here becomes immediately obvious; it is literally a problem of life or

⁵Ibid., 232.

⁶Ibid., 241.

death consequences. Another example of man's development upsetting nature can be seen in our present population explosion; nature provides solutions to this problem, but man has triumphed over nature only to find himself in even more dire straits. Thus, whatever else we may conclude from the study of natural science, we must conclude that man has not yet really "come of age." Man is not God. Lorenz puts it very well: "The long-sought missing link between animals and the really human being is ourselves!"⁷ Furthermore, natural science posits the natural order as the real power; man is simply the most powerful single creature.

Natural science is not alone in arguing against the belief that man is "come of age." Many are arguing from the point of psychology as well. Lorenz, we have noted, is critical of the contemporary attitude toward freedom because it tends to be blind to all forces other than man's consciousness. Heredity, Lorenz maintains, limits man's freedom. Psychologists point out that our personalities limit our freedom, as does our environment. We are conditioned to act in certain ways. Yet, the modern technological view of man tends to posit a man who is completely free. Not only is such a view unrealistic, it points to an attitude quite out of keeping with "man come of age." "Man come of age" is supposed to be mature man, but what could be more immature than the belief that we have no limitations, that we act as completely free agents? The technological view of man is popular

⁷Ibid., 229.

for both good and bad reasons, and one of the bad reasons certainly is that it sanctifies the rebellion against authority which we find so attractive. It tells us that we are subject to no one and no power; this is exactly what every child wants to be told. We know from studies of child psychology that without authority figures, the child will not mature. Surely, we can carry this thinking over to society in general. As long as we recognize no authority we can never attain maturity. It is essential to personality and sociological development to question and to rebel, but the rebellious child must grow up. The recognition of authority outside ourselves and the realization that we are not completely free are parts of maturity. To rebel against all authority is to remain a child. R. S. Lee has maintained that one of the reasons why atheism is popular in our century is because it projects the wish that the father should be non-existent; just as the child's wish is unrealistic, so is our wish to rid ourselves of God.⁸ We can make the same criticism of the "God is dead" theologians. They stress the belief in man as autonomous and independent now that he has "come of age," yet, "insistence on one's autonomy is more typically the mark of adolescence than of maturity."⁹

Another danger ushered in by our stress on technology is seen in our faith only in material things. Obviously this is

⁸ R. S. Lee, Freud and Christianity, London, 1948, 138.

⁹ John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology, New York, 1966, 73.

only an expression of our deeper faith in ourselves, in man's ability. Thus, the things he creates are seen as supremely important. "Our preoccupation with things, with what is manageable; our reliance on things, whether machines, cars, television sets or hydrogen bombs; our belief that the way of least resistance, of efficiency, time and labor saving is the way of wisdom; and that to be secure is to be alive; all this seems to be anything but mature."¹⁰ In our stress on the material we forget that the immaterial and intangible things of life are the only things worthy of this implicit faith. Take, for example, love; it is intangible, and although we know through our study of psychology of the motivations which prompt love, it remains a powerful sub-conscious force. We may rationalize our loves and see why we are prompted to love certain things and people, but our rationalizations cannot cause us to love. This force in our lives is far more capable of establishing security than are our material goods, but to admit the power of love is to admit our own limitations. If we deny that we have limitations, then we shut off the passageways which can lead us to something of the security we are seeking. The security that the technological view of man offers us is too often simply a delusion of grandeur. We escape, thereby, from facing man as he really is; instead, we imagine that we are ideal man. It is hardly an accident that our society rushes headlong, almost in a frenzy, not taking time to think where it is headed.

¹⁰ Werner & Lotte Pelz, God is No More, Philadelphia, 1964, 11.

Society is a psychotic rushing to escape from facing reality.

If we are not God, then who is? Christianity has traditionally answered this question by equating God with that power which seems universally to limit man. We experience the "Other" or the transcendent power which causes us to define ourselves as finite and limited. There is a great deal of truth in this traditional view, but it does not contain the whole truth. And because it does not communicate the whole truth it fails to sound convincing to many in our age. Surely, God is that power by which we recognize our own lack of power, but we are wrong to stress only man's limitations in this respect, for God is also experienced as a constituting power. He is not only that power which defines our limitations but is also that power which makes sense out of our world. We experience God as the unifying force which gives order to the world. The weakness of so much of our theology is that it has stressed the difference between God and man rather than God's endowments to man; it has taken a negative approach rather than a positive approach. It has claimed that we experience God by only one of our affections, "angst," anxiety or dread. Even such modern theologies as Macquarrie express anxiety as a necessary condition for revelation.¹¹ We also experience God in the affection of joy resulting from our sense of something wonderful at work in the world and in man. This affection is thoroughly as valid as that of anxiety, and if we are going to

¹¹ Macquarrie, op. cit., Ch. IV.

communicate the Christian God to the modern mind then we are going to have to accentuate God as the constituting and creating force of our world.

Man in the 20th century is tired, and justifiably so, of being degraded by a religion which tries to instill guilt in order to manifest God. Yes, man is finite and limited, but this is not the end of the story. This is how man was created, and it is only through creation that we can come to know man in his true sense. We have labored the fall of man to the point that we have almost completely destroyed biblical religion. The Bible, unlike so much of Christian theology, is not fixated on the fall of man. Rather, the Bible (in both the New Testament and Old Testament) accentuates the goodness of creation and the favored position of man with God. The biblical God takes an uncanny interest in man. God adopts men to be His sons; He works in their history and He asks them to work to make their history His history. In the person of Jesus of Nazareth, God proves once and for all that human life is holy and good. He enters the world He has created as a creature. Genesis I records that creation was good and pleasing to God, and the first chapter of St. John's Gospel proclaims a new relationship between God and man, one in which man becomes an even more important part in God's creation. It is in the terms of biblical religion, in terms of creation, that God is best communicated to modern man.

The Christian church of today is fighting desperately to become "relevant" in the twentieth century, but she will never

become "relevant" by denying all grounds for man's new confidence in his own powers, no matter how exaggerated these claims may be. Rather, the church must examine the doctrine of man anew; it must proclaim the new power of man, for such power cannot be denied. It must account for this power, and it must proclaim that we derive this power from God. "Man's new-found power and confidence enables him to pick up once more his partnership with God in doing the work of the world. His need to know God is therefore relatively greater now than it was in an earlier, more frightened time, when just to trust Him seemed enough."¹² Trust is not enough; we must enter joyfully into our partnership with God, and this requires sacrifice and discipline if we are going to do His work. In Him alone can we "come of age"; in Him alone can we establish our maturity. Only as we work with God will man be able to become what both God and man have always wanted man to become. We must strive with enthusiasm to "come of age." Yet, we must be careful that our enthusiasm is truly oriented toward doing God's work:

It is not enthusiasm in itself that is in any way noble, but humanity's great goals which it can be called upon to defend. That indeed is the Janus head of man: The only being capable of dedicating himself to the very highest moral and ethical values requires for this purpose a phylogenetically adapted mechanism of behavior whose animal properties bring with them the danger that he will kill his brothers, convinced that he is doing so in the in-

¹²Mesthene, op. cit., 77.

terests of those very same high values. Ecce homo!¹³

Clearly, there is great danger in the human tendency to regard man as capable of achieving his highest self by himself. We are not God, and we can only destroy ourselves by pretending that we are God (this is the real message of the fall). It is necessary for us to recognize our dependence, but having recognized it, we can go on to bring about the new age for man. "It is only by consciously recognizing the transcendent that earthly values and other persons can be recognized in their real dignity."¹⁴ Our failure to accomplish our goal, our failure "to come of age," results from the temptation to see ourselves only in relationship with ourselves: "Our generation looks carefully at its peer groups for the clues as to what is important and unimportant. Therefore, instead of principles derived from the Christian revelation, we live attuned to whatever is now in vogue."¹⁵ What is in vogue changes, so that when we place our confidence here it is doomed to disappointment. Only when we fix our attention on that power which is outside ourselves can we fix a secure course. "There is, in other words, always a dimension beyond the social—a continuing relation with Him who is the Lord of this world and for whom service is undertaken."¹⁶

¹³ Lorenz, op. cit., 274.

¹⁴ Teresa Mary DeFerrari, C.S.C., "The Relation of Contemplation and Action," Worship, v. 41, n. 1, 50.

¹⁵ Edward Farley, Requiem for a Lost Piety, Philadelphia, 1966, 41.

¹⁶ John B. Coburn, "Contemporary Non-Catholic Spirituality and the Guidance of Souls," Worship, v. 39, n. 10, 624.

Rather than a denying of the world and its value, we must ever reaffirm the value of our world. It is a holy creation; it is the work of the God who creates order. A while back we mentioned man's affections which bring him to a recognition of the transcendent power of God. We admitted that the affection of anxiety does play a part in our recognition of God, but we must now point out that this affection is not enough to spark in us a devotion to our work with God. It is only as we move beyond anxious fear and perceive God's power in joy that we can hope to be His sons. Anxiety can only produce fear and guilt; it cannot produce love and freedom, the basic marks of the Christian, the basic marks of "man come of age." Our lack of power and our dependence does not make of us sinners; we have no reason to feel guilty because we cannot accomplish our fondest dreams. "We are sinners, not because we do this or leave that undone, but because we refuse to follow our hope, to trust our desires, to obey our vision; because we prefer to unlive our lives and cannot help fearing that to live them involves too much of a risk; because we feel secure only in doing that which denies the possibility of growth."¹⁷ Our greatest sin is that which degrades human nature, believing it to be the very antithesis of God. When we do this we "live against our truth," to use Goldbrunner's phrase;¹⁸ we become spiritually ill. Spiritual health is pos-

¹⁷Pelz, op. cit., 116.

¹⁸Josef Goldbrunner, Holiness is Wholeness, New York, 1955, 26-27.

sible only when we can accept man as co-worker with God. This acceptance necessarily includes an acceptance of the physical world and our physical bodies as entities which derive their glory from God. Man's theater of action, the place in which he works for God, is the world; it is the present world and not some spiritual realm to be enjoyed after physical death. Biblical religion proclaims that the body is as holy as the soul. Man is an integrated being; the whole man is being called to "come of age." We can "come of age" only as we live in the world and are a true part of it: "What we need are spurs to force us into life, not a bridle to curb an exuberant 'joie de vivre.'"¹⁹

What does all this have to do with prayer? Well, it seems to me that the first consideration in a discussion of prayer must be the parties who are involved in it; the parties are man and God. Secondly, we must establish the relationship between the parties; in this case we have concluded that man is dependent on God. Thirdly, we must ascertain where this relationship takes place; we have seen that it takes place in the world. This rather lengthy prolegomenon ascertains where we are as men in the twentieth century. No consideration of prayer can be undertaken until we analyze who we are and where we are. The failure of so much Christian writing is that it fails to take stock of the present, as if its message were changeless, as if man were not an evolutionary creature. The message must change if it is to keep

¹⁹Ibid., 20.

pace with changing man. "The point about most ecclesiastical spirituality is that it is neither here nor there. That is, it does not key in with the actual concerns of living men, so it's not here, which is where God is; and it's not there, it hasn't really got that spiritual depth....But the spirituality of Christianity is precisely concerned with the 'here' which has the 'there' in it, and the 'there' which draws you out of the 'here,' but not with a 'neither here nor there' in the 'betwixt and between.'"²⁰

We will deal further with the relationship between the "here" and the "there" in the following chapters. The primary aim of this chapter has been to establish firmly the glorious calling of man to work hand-in-hand with God to bring into being His plan. Prayer comes into the picture because "prayer is the means whereby God shares his plan with us."²¹

²⁰David E. Jenkins, "To Whom is Prayer Addressed?," an address delivered to the Consultation on Contemporary Spirituality, June, 1966, 5.

²¹Bernard Bro, O.P., Learning to Pray, trans. John Morriss, New York, 1966, 13.

Chapter II

Commitment - Our Life of Prayer

The relationship between man and God which we have thus far been discussing is of prime importance to a consideration of prayer. Without laying this theological groundwork any consideration of prayer is quite impossible. The relationship between ourselves and God must ever be kept in the back of our mind; all of ascetical theology ultimately assumes a particular concept of the God-man relationship. Many of the older treatments of prayer have tended to stress the great gap between man and God; these make a great deal of man's powerlessness over outside forces. As we said in Chapter I, however, this theological stance has been forced to modify itself again and again in order to accomodate the scientific and technological advancements of man. Is it any wonder that the God posited in these treatments suffers humiliation at the hands of educated men? Such a God will inevitably die, and no amount of propping up by the church will save Him. The church which alienates those who think will suffer the fate of other primitive religions in the technological age. The tragic thing is that this older theological concept of man in trying to give glory to God ends up by positing a God whose power does not rest in Himself but in a comparison with man's powerlessness. "It surely does no glory to God to rest his power on the impotence of man."¹ Surely God is above the pettiness of magnifying oneself by degrading someone else. God did not create man merely to prove His superiority over His creatures.

¹Mesthene, op. cit., 31.

We have pointed out the great dangers today of thinking of the difference between man's and God's power in terms of man replacing God. Humanism's argument is really no better than the argument which debases man. Both exaggerate reality by trying to portray power as the unique property of either God or man. The truth of the matter is that power belongs to both God and man. It does not belong to both in such a way that there is a distinctly different realm of power for each party, however. Power is shared by God and man. But we must be careful not to make a dualism of this power; God and man are not equal forces. Rather, man derives his power from God, and God freely gives power to His creature, man. The power man manifests is God's power and what we see of God's power is manifested in men. It is in the context of glorious union between the purpose of the Creator and the creature that prayer is born. Prayer is the dialogue which takes place between man and God, but this dialogue can only take place when man realizes who he is in relationship to God.

"The first moment of true prayer occurs in the experience and awareness of one's limitations....In this sense, prayer has the value of pedagogy, it is the great pedagogy of God."² True, the experience of God as limiting power does frequently initiate prayer, but if this experience leads to feelings of guilt and overpowering dread no life of prayer can develop. When we become fixated on our own limitations, we are quite unable to lead

²Bro, op. cit., 6.

the kind of lives God has created us to live. God did not create man to languish and lament over what he is not or what he would like to be. Nor did God create us to deny our God-given nature in order to try to live as gods. "God does not call us to give up our wills, our pleasures, or our desires even for him. He made us able to enjoy and desire, not only himself, but his creation in which we are placed."³ He enables us to enjoy creation even as He enjoys it by ever creating it anew. We can, if we do not fall into the trap of thinking ourselves gods, take our rightful place in the creating process. God is calling us to be the men He created us to be; He is calling us to take the power He has enabled us to take. God is calling us to take upon ourselves the commitment to Him which enables us to truly become His children.

Commitment is the key to living a Christian life, and as such, commitment is what makes our life of prayer possible. It is not enough to formulate concepts of God or theological propositions about man's relationship to Him. The Christian is not one who knows about God, he is one who knows God in encounter. There is a living relationship between God and man. This relationship is always a personal relationship because we are persons and God is a personal God. Our commitment to God like all of our commitments to other men involves risk, because commitment always requires that we trust something outside ourselves. We move outside the realm

³Farley, op. cit., 78.

of our own power and place ourselves in the hands of another. Of course, there is always a certain amount of fear involved in this; we might be wrong in trusting the other person. But we are driven by an even greater fear into making commitments with others, for we know our own limitations and our powerlessness. We know that we cannot always trust ourselves or our own knowledge, and so we commit ourselves to others in trust. When we make the decision to go to see a doctor in order to discover the cause of a certain ache or pain or just to see if we are well as we hope we are, we are making a commitment. We decide to trust the superior medical knowledge of the doctor because we cannot be sure of our own diagnosis; we place ourselves at his hands, trusting that he will conscientiously strive to discover any maladies we may have and will treat them accordingly. Of course, we may trust ourselves to a quack who will be unable to help us and who may do even greater harm. This is the chance we take when we decide to trust another. Yet, it is obviously foolish to trust another without some criterion for trust; our own inadequacies should not force us to flee into the hands of just any person. In the case of our doctor, we should pick someone who we know is well trained and trustworthy. Fortunately, universities and state examinations have done a great deal to screen doctors, so we can feel relatively safe in the hands of any doctor who has graduated from an accredited school and who has passed the examinations of the state. In trusting the doctor we escape from fear and gain security.

In choosing our God we can see certain parallels with choosing a doctor. A certain degree of security accompanies our decision to trust God. Of course, that security is pretty tenuous if we have decided in our desperation to trust any God. The decision to trust God, like the decision to trust a doctor, must be based on what we know of the competence and goodness of the other person whom we have decided to trust. Gods do not attain formal accreditation, nor are there state examinations to determine skill in godliness; yet each of us must investigate the credentials of the God with whom we are about to enter into relationship. There must be grounds for the trust required in commitment. It is just for this reason that our God cannot be some impersonal principal; God must be personal. We can only trust persons and our God is, therefore, a Person. We begin to trust as we begin to know the other person, and our trust is manifested in love. This love for the other person (be he man or God) is a liberating force. In trust and love we free ourselves from ourselves: "In love for man and love for God the yearning heart watches out for the other who can liberate it from the confinement of the single person, break through the wall of isolation and fill it with the gift of communion."⁴

Trust of God, like trust of any other person, cannot afford to be groundless. We are living in delusion if we think that trust can survive the tragedies of life if it is not grounded

⁴Goldbrunner, op. cit., 59.

in the facts of life and experience. God is experienced as that Power beyond ourselves which seems to give order and continuity to the world. He is that Power that seems to give our own lives meaning, purpose, and direction. He is that Power which has endowed mankind with power (see Chapter I). For the Christian, this constituting Power is also seen as the loving God, the Father of Jesus of Nazareth. In Jesus we come to know the God who is worthy of implicit trust. I think, however, that John Burnaby is correct when he asserts: "A man must know something of what it means to have God in himself, before he can confess that he owes that presence to the union of Godhead and mankind in Jesus."⁵ Man must first sense God as a constituting power and not simply a limiting power. Only then can the mission of Jesus be properly understood. It is then that we see the workings of God not in spite of man by assertion of His power over us, but in men when they choose to do His will. We can see the devotion and selflessness of Jesus whose perfect obedience to God's will shows us the path by which all men "come of age." It is in the example of Jesus that we see most clearly the pattern God wishes all men to follow. It is in the life of selfless giving that we become co-creators with God; only as we follow the example of the Christ can we do the Father's work in the world. This road which begins in God's love for us proceeds to our trust and commitment to do God's work, and it ends in "man's coming of age,"

⁵ John Burnaby, "Christian Prayer," Soundings, ed. A. R. Vidler, Cambridge, 1962.

man's perfect maturity. This road is the road of the evolution of mankind from animals to human beings; it is the story of God's most blessed creatures.

When the Christian speaks of redemption, therefore, he is speaking of a giant step in the process of creation. Redemption is that act of God which confirms man's creating role; it sanctifies human life in such a way that the work of God may be done in it. The message of redemption is the "Good News" that God's love is so strong that He has chosen to share his holy work with men. When we are brought into encounter with Jesus we hear the "Good News." "When the Word of God [Jesus] in person comes to us and encounters our life, we no longer live in the first instance under a commandment which oppresses and threatens us as though from outside. The first thing that the incarnate Word of the Father has to tell us is the good news of the love which calls us to himself."⁶ It is this creating, redeeming God with whom we are brought into the relationship which is manifested in commitment. It is this God who has proven His love whom we can trust in confidence. God, and only He, can create in us that person we long to be; **only** He can create mankind in the image long hoped for by men. There is no freedom in the tiny self-centered world in which we live, a world of anxiety and fear. We begin to live as free men only when we begin to live a life of commitment to the God who is already committed to us. Yes, commitment starts in

⁶ Bernard Haring, A Sacramental Spirituality, New York, 1965, 5.

God's action and is fulfilled in man's response. We cannot earn God's love, and we certainly cannot force Him to grant us freedom. Yet, He comes to us so that we may encounter Him. "The lesson of the Incarnation is that you cannot do a thing about getting nearer God," George Macleod has said.⁷ This lesson is at the heart of the Christian Gospel; it is God who initiates the dialogue which is the Christian life.

Commitment must issue in dialogue, for dialogue is the continuation of commitment; it is continuous recommitment. For the Christian, all of life becomes our dialogue with God, for communication between man and God must ever be kept up if we are to do the creating work He wants us to do. Thus, all of our life and work becomes a prayer. Dialogue between man and God is, after all, what prayer is (this will be discussed more fully in the next two chapters). Dialogue (prayer) begins in commitment and it lives in recommitment. "So we pray to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God who is discovered in encounter, who is vindicated in Jesus, and whose discovery is renewed in existence."⁸ Commitment which leads to a life of prayer is made possible by Jesus, and in Jesus we come face to face with the epitome of worship and life lived at its highest level.

Jesus is not only the revelation of the redeeming God; he is also the supreme worshipper of the Father, the supreme realization of all religion.

⁷George Macleod, Only One Way Left, Glasgow, 1957, 155.

⁸Jenkins, op. cit., 2.

Jesus became the Redeemer in actual fact by freely living his human life in religious worship of and attachment to the Father. In Christ not only were God and his love for men revealed, but God showed us in him what it is for a man to commit himself unconditionally to God the invisible Father. In this way God revealed to us the embodiment of religion, the countenance of a truly religious man.⁹

It is in the life of Jesus that we see commitment and prayer most clearly manifested. He offers his life back to the Giver of Life, and this self-offering in commitment is the mark of perfect freedom as well as the living of perfect prayer.

There can be no doubt that we are living in a day when commitment is on the wane and prayer is being abandoned. Oh yes, we may pay lip service to commitment and to the value of prayer, but too many people fail to carry out commitment and prayer in their own lives. We may rationalize prayer using all the correct language, but the temptation is ever present to talk instead of to do. It is the doing, the acting out of commitment, that costs. Let no one delude himself into thinking that commitment is easy. It cost Jesus his life. If it does not cost us our actual physical lives, it will assuredly cost us time and effort. It is not easy to be a creator and to do the work God calls us to do. Yet, His work is undoubtedly the most worthwhile project in which we may engage. Only as we do the work of God can we realize those hopes mankind has ever held dear. In this work is love and freedom. But this work cannot be done simply by our wanting

⁹Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God, New York, 1963, 18.

the end result; we must work to bring about the desired end. When we do this our lives become prayers. The reason why so much of contemporary Christian piety falls flat on its face is that it is not a piety which has anything to do with our real lives. It is this trend of superficiality in Christian existentialism of which Edward Farley is most critical: "We talk about the importance of despair, relevance, and existential encounter with God, not because we experience these things, but because we think we ought to experience them. And we fear down deep that we really do not. This means that the piety of Christian existentialism is mostly a piety of talk."¹⁰ If we are to "come of age," we will have to move beyond the stage of talk to the stage of living prayer.

There is a great deal of false piety today, largely because we try to revive the older concept of prayer which called men to deny physical life and the material world. Such prayer is anything but natural, and it is no wonder that it so frequently turns out such a failure. Let us leave this outmoded concept of prayer (it deserves to die; it must die). Let us instead live in relationship to God by committing ourselves to Him. The inauthentic piety which we see all around does a great deal of disservice to Christian piety. It has caused modern man to suspect the validity of prayer entirely; so much of what passes for prayer is done without commitment. We cannot hide behind pious words or even pious

¹⁰ Farley, op. cit., 112.

acts, for if they are not based in commitment, this fact will soon become obvious to all.

I'm convinced myself that people will learn how to pray—or be prepared to learn how to pray—if it looks as though people who are praying are doing something authentic....Only a few people can cope with certain types of mathematics but people will still believe that those people are on to something because the whole operation is one of authenticity. ¹¹

The point is that prayer becomes valid only if it is the result of commitment. Prayer without commitment is at its best empty words and at its worse hypocrisy. The life of commitment is a life of prayer and vice versa. Prayer is the dialogue between man and God grounded in mutual commitment, and it is only as our dialogue grows and becomes deeper that we can learn the will of God and do the same.

The place where prayer, where this dialogue, takes place is the world, because this is where we find both God and ourselves. We have stressed the fact that prayer is a dialogue between God and man; as such, the whole man participates in his prayer. Our goal in prayer is not to deny our existence as men; rather, prayer "is the affirmation of one's own being, within the context of his own personal situation—with thanksgiving."¹² For a long time many have insisted that the world is inherently evil, and for that reason we cannot meet the holy God in the matters of the world. Certainly there is no more alien doctrine to the Chris-

¹¹ Jenkins, op. cit., 4.

¹² John B. Coburn, "A Contemporary Mood: Some Issues and Questions About Prayer," Horizons of Theological Education, ed. Coburn et al, Dayton, 1966, s-40.

tian Gospel than this. The God we worship is the God who both created this world and who has ever acted in it. The Christian God has entered human life and our world in His Son, Jesus. Moreover, He has never absented Himself from his creation; He is working in the world today as He has ever worked in the past, as He will ever work in the future. "God is already in the world; the 'hidden Christ' is already moving in the hearts of men and in their corporate lives. Our task is to try to discern where the Spirit is already living and moving—where reconciliation is taking place—and to cooperate with him in the world of human affairs."¹³ Our work as well as God's work is done in the world. It is in the world that we carry on our creating task.

Therefore, prayer can never be an escape from responsibility in and to the world. Too many have looked on prayer as an escape from this world into some spiritual realm, but it is for this realm (and not another) that we were created. Prayer as an escape from doing our job in the world is both psychologically and theologically disastrous, for in such escape we try to live as some other being, a being we cannot become. For good reason, the young Karl Barth asked: "Is there any human activity so utterly questionable as the busy praying of men?"¹⁴ The Christian life is one of stark reality; to be a Christian requires a realistic living of life to its fullest. Our basic task is to do God's

¹³ Coburn, "Contemporary Non-Catholic Spirituality...", *op. cit.*, 623.

¹⁴ Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, trans. Edwyn Hoskyns, Oxford, 1933.

will. "When we desire His will to be done the 'inner' and 'outer' become one in adoration and self-giving."¹⁵ This self-giving requires trust in God, belief that he will be with us and that dialogue will continue in all that life may bring. This trust enables us to escape the tyranny of our own self-centeredness which can only lead to anxiety and fear. In trust in God we enter the larger sphere of His action and leave the minute sphere where we are the only one that matters. In some of the later writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer we see the combination of personal failure yet continued trust in God:

When a man has entirely abandoned the attempt to make anything of himself, whether it be a saint or a converted sinner, a churchman, a righteous or unrighteous man, a sick man or a healthy one—then he begins to live what I mean by a worldly life, accepting it all with its duties and problems, its successes and failures, its experiences and the sense of helplessness—and then he flings himself entirely into the arms of God.¹⁶

We are called to fling ourselves into God's arms, and we can do so because we know His love for us. Of course, this sort of thing can become an escape from facing our own problems. The whole matter of the relationship between prayer and action is the subject of Chapter IV; therefore, I do not wish to state here any more than a minimal definition of prayer as the action of all life dedicated to God. I simply wish to accentuate the fact that no part of our life is incongruous with prayer. Even our

¹⁵ Evelyn Underhill, The Spiritual Life, New York, 40.

¹⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, London, 1953, July 21, 1944.

fears should be offered up to God; certainly this is what Jesus did that last night in Gethsemane. His prayer in the agony of fear has inspired Karl Rahner to the following meditation:

O prayer of anguish, prayer of abandonment, prayer of unfathomable weakness, prayer of a forsaken God, let us adore You. If You prayed like this, O Jesus, if You prayed in such agony, is there any abyss so deep that we cannot call out from it to Your Father? Is there any despair so hopeless that it cannot become a prayer by being encompassed within Your abandonment? ¹⁷

Before we leave this matter of commitment, we should examine its corporate basis. Christian life and prayer is essentially corporate; this does not deny our individual relationship with God, but it does deny that our commitment is only an individual matter. We have said that in commitment we prepare ourselves to do the tasks which God is calling us to do, we prepare to do His creating work. Yet, no individual (no matter how talented that individual may be) can hope to do God's work in isolation. No one person has sufficient talent to do this seemingly impossible task. Cooperation and mutual responsibility are absolutely necessary. Man by his very nature is dependent upon other men; man is a social being by necessity. In no other animal is there so wide a range of abilities and talents as in man. In our evolution we have developed marked differences in intelligence and manual dexterity, not to mention interests. As society has progressed, no message comes clearer than that of man's

¹⁷ Karl Rahner, Watch and Pray with Me, trans. William V. Dych, New York, 1966, 52.

increasing dependence on others in society. Technologically oriented society is marked by the steady increase in mutual dependence. In our tendency toward specialization we have enabled society to advance, but we have also made the individuals within society much more dependent on each other. As knowledge of our world and of ourselves has increased, we have been forced to specialize; no individual has the capacity to learn competence in all areas of intellectual activity. This specialization shows up in all ways of making a living, not just in intellectual pursuits. The Industrial Revolution has ushered in newer and more confined divisions of labor, and these are necessary to advancing society. In the face of this utter dependence on others and the depersonalization which necessarily accompanies it, man's corporate nature has become more obvious.

Not only is corporateness a necessary evil. For the Christian the corporate nature of mankind is seen as the great and wonderful purpose of God for man. Our task is to carry on the work which Christ initiated, the work of reconciling in love, the work of creating the new age. This work depends entirely on cooperation and the sharing of talents and abilities. When Christians speak of being the Body of Christ, they mean that they are a union of men and women who continue to do the work Christ began. He is no longer on earth, but his Body is active in the world; he lives in the body of Christians, and they live in him. The absolute necessity for cooperation among the individual members of

this Body is the point made by Saint Paul in the twelfth chapter of I Corinthians. He compares this body to a human body. The organs of our bodies are dependent upon each other; if one suffers, they all suffer. Only as the body works as an integrated whole can the body function correctly. This is equally true of Christ's Body, the Body of all Christians. If one member is not doing his job, then the whole Body suffers. Only as the individual members work together in harmony can the work be properly done.

So when we speak of commitment, we must necessarily see it as not only individual commitment to God, but commitment to each other so that we will really be doing the work God wills us to do. The Christian life can never be lived as an isolated relationship of one child to the Father. Christian living is essentially family living. The members of the family have their own special responsibilities to the other members. Our family is the world; all men are our brothers. All of us are united by God and in Christ into one family. Our task is to create by God's help a new and more glorious man; our task is to evolve in Him.

For this reason, all of prayer is tinged with an element of this corporateness. Prayer is spoken in the first person plural, because none of us are in relationship with God alone. "It is we who pray, the Church of Christ, not the ego in its isolation."¹⁸ Prayer is that relationship between man and God which enables deeper relationship between man and his brothers. Commitment and

¹⁸Burnaby, op. cit., 233.

prayer frees us from the narrowness of our own world; it opens the door to love, the principal responsibility of Christian man. Love, which necessarily brings with it freedom, enables us to move into the sphere of action in which we all live but from which we try to escape into ourselves. Love and commitment are linked because love depends on commitment; both are essential to freedom from self. Rahner writes: "In love my whole being streams forth out of the rigid confines of narrowness and anxious self-assertion which make me a prisoner of my own poverty and emptiness."¹⁹

In corporate worship we especially dramatize the inclusive nature of Christian living. This is why the Eucharist is the basic act of corporate worship; it perfectly symbolizes our unity. We gather together and eat, and in so doing we receive the same food so that we may return to do our special and individual tasks. The Eucharist unites Christ's Body by giving to every organ the same essential grace or food. It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider in any detail corporate worship services or liturgical prayer, but in our consideration of prayer it is essential to remember that all prayer is at its heart corporate. We are always a member of the Body, and even though we pray as an individual member, our prayer must be made in the spirit of corporateness. Only the constant reminder of our duty toward other men and our responsibility for them can save our prayers from the fate of becoming selfish demands.

¹⁹Karl Rahner, Encounters With Silence, Westminster, Maryland, 1962, 8.

Chapter III

Our Dialogue - Kinds of Prayer

We have seen that when our life becomes a continuous dialogue in conscious relationship to God we are living a life or prayer. The Christian life is a prayer, a life-long dialogue with God. We have said that this dialogue, like all dialogue is based in trust, and it requires commitment on our part. But commitment is not something we make once for all time, for if dialogue is to continue, there must be continuous commitment, a continuous recollection of our relationship. We must ever remind ourselves that we are in dialogue with God, and the longer our dialogue continues the stronger our relationship will be.

Our relationship with God is not unlike our relationships with other people. The more we talk to other people, the greater our trust in them becomes; we feel easier and we are able to open up ourselves and talk frankly to them. If a bond of love exists between other people and ourselves, we are even able after a time to share with them the deepest secrets and desires of our heart. We are committed to such people, and they are committed to us. Such a relationship of commitment exists as a result of mutual trust. So it is in our relationship with God. We have discussed our grounds, indeed, our necessity, for trusting in God. But we must guard against the persistent tendency to confine our relationship to God to times when the pressures of the world are so great that we must recognize our own inabilities. For our relationship with God, like our relationships with others, exists at all times, and not only when we are in particular need of com-

fort. If our relationship with Him is to grow we must maintain conversation at all times. If we examine our relationships with friends who console us we can see clearly that these relationships go on even when we do not feel the need of consolation. In fact, we would not find consolation from these relationships if they were not founded on something more lasting. We can trust those people who console us only because we have been in relationship with them in good and prosperous times as well as in times of trouble. Our relationship with them is a strong one because it involves numerous commitments made under a variety of different situations; our dialogue has become deeper and our bond of love greater.

Our commitments to God too must be made on a continuous basis; our dialogue with Him must never stop. This process is what older discussions of prayer call "practicing the presence of God." And, although the phrase is somewhat trite, this is exactly what we are called to do. The Christian life is based on the recognition that God is always present in our world and in our life, that he is always accessible and available and ready to listen. His continuous presence creates for the Christian the opportunity for continual dialogue. Life can become a continuous talk with God. Because our lives are filled with a multiplicity of events in numerous settings, the way we talk to God will change according to the particular situation. Our conversations with friends follow numerous patterns depending on the particular situation in

which our dialogue takes place. Classically, our dialogues with God have been divided into five particular types: adoration, intercession, confession, and thanksgiving. Every one of these is a type of conversation or dialogue with God; each one renews and strengthens our relationship with God. Each time we employ one of these types of dialogue we make an act of recommitment to God in the loving spirit of trust. Let us now look individually at these five types of conversation with God.

Adoration

The reader may think it strange that we begin our discussion of the classical types of prayer with adoration, that type which is usually discussed last. The reason why so many discussions of prayer consider adoration last is because it is usually thought of as being the least selfish or self-centered of the types of prayer; many older writings maintain for this reason that it is the highest form of prayer. In a limited sense, adoration is the highest form of prayer, but if we see Christian prayer as a dialogue with God, a talk between ourselves and God, then no type of prayer can be selfless. Nor should any be! There should be a good bit of us in all our earnest prayers. Dialogue by its very nature must impart something of both individuals involved if it is to be meaningful. True adoration is not impersonal reflection on God, but is our personal adoration of our God. We, ourselves, are the ones who are in relationship with God; we personally ponder His love and graciousness towards us. If we think that

we can adore God in some remote and highly impersonal way, dialogue has been broken off and we are engaged in a mental discipline rather than in prayer.

We should not strive to make adoration selfless, but we should recognize that it is by its very nature the least selfish of our prayers. It is the basis of all Christian prayer, and it is for this reason that we are discussing it first. Adoration is the recognition of our utter dependence on God and our thankful response for that dependence (the latter will be discussed more fully under the heading of thanksgiving). We have said that we begin to "come of age" when we recognize that the world does not rest on our shoulders; rather it was created and is sustained by a loving God, a God who has proven His love in the life and death of His Son Jesus. When we make a commitment to this God, when we decide to trust Him, when we recognize His power and our own powerlessness, when we know His love for us, then we have begun our dialogue with Him. We call this dialogue adoration.

Prayer begins in adoration. Even the anguished cry for help in a time of danger or pain includes an act of adoration. It is the sudden and awful realization of our own helplessness, our own dependence on something outside ourselves. Such a dependence is a prayer of adoration, but it is not necessarily a Christian prayer. Christian adoration goes one step further; it is a cry for help which is coupled with a commitment to trust the God who has loved us and who has proven His love. It is the recognition of

our dependence on that God, the God of love, the Father of Jesus Christ. It is sometimes easier to make our commitment in a time of stress or trouble because we feel this dependence to a greater degree. But dialogue cannot be limited to such times. We must carry our dialogue of adoration at all times in our life. We must remind ourselves of our dependence on God if we are to enjoy the freedom which accompanies this dependence (see Chapter II). When we start taking ourselves too seriously, we lose our freedom and become slaves to ourselves once again. Another part of adoration is our loving response back to God, a response made possible by His love for us. Adoration, then, is the dialogue in which we marvel continually at the power and love of God. We accept the freedom which dependence on Him brings, and we return His love. Our words in this dialogue should remain simple, and they should always be sincere. They need not be elaborate nor high sounding, for our relationship with God is one which we should accept simply and thankfully. It is in adoration that we remind ourselves of our trust in God who loves us, and it is this spirit of trust that undergirds all of our prayer. Adoration is the necessary base of the other four kinds of prayer.

Petition

Petition is that type of prayer which immediately follows on the heels of the spirit of dependence expressed in adoration; it verbalizes the particular thing which troubles us and asks God to help us. It is, in the time of need, the completion of ador-

ation; it goes beyond the general trust in God to a trusting of Him in a specific situation. Here again, many people feel guilty about making petitions because it seems to them to be a selfish way of praying. It is true that we pray for ourselves in petition, but there is nothing selfish in this act if done in the right spirit. We think nothing of expressing our fondest hopes and desires to our friends. Why then should we fail to express these things in dialogue with God? We know that He cares for us and that He loves us, and it is, therefore, only natural that we should open ourselves to Him trusting in His care and love.

To be sure, our petitions can become selfish if we think that we can force God by them to do whatever we want Him to do. Sooner or later almost all children experience the rude awakening which inevitably follows such a view of their power and their prayers. It soon becomes evident that God does not grant all our petitions, not even those which we believe to be most necessary to our well being or even our survival. It is this disillusionment with our supposed relationship to God that causes many people to give up all prayer entirely, for it does not do them any recognizable good to pray. Perhaps they go so far as to doubt that there is a God. The god they had believed in was a god who gratified human wishes, and this is not the Christian God, the God who carries out His own will.

Petition, then, if it is to be Christian, must be made in recognition of our position in relationship to God's position.

Petition must be made in the spirit of adoration; that is, our petitions are reminders that we are limited in power and dependent on God. It is not in our power to do all of what we want to do or to obtain all that we wish. Petition is asking in remembrance that God has created us and that He loves us. The Bible tells us that He knows of what we have need before we ask it, and some have precluded, therefore, that petition is not necessary. To conclude this, however, is to miss the point of petition, for we in no way benefit God by making petitions; the benefit derived from petition is clearly for ourselves. God truly knows our needs before we pray, but we are in great need of knowing that we are dependent on His power. And this need to be cognizant of God's power and His love is ever conditioned by our making frequent petitions to Him.

Christian petition is the existential, practical manifestation of adoration. "By my prayer I do not move God to come to me but God moves me to come to Him."¹ I come to God to discuss my needs with Him, our dialogue centers on my needs. By telling them to God, I rethink them and I ponder my situation anew. Perhaps, after this is done, I will understand my situation better. Of course, I may not, but I can be sure that I have a loving Father who cares what happens because He has created and redeemed me. D. Z. Phillips describes Christian petition in this way: "When deep religious believers pray for something, they are not

¹James Huntington, O.H.C., The Work of Prayer, West Park, 1921, 36.

so much asking God to bring this about, but in a way telling Him of the strength of their desires. They realize that things may not go as they wish, but they are asking to be able to go on living whatever happens."² This sort of petition can be seen in the life of Jesus. His prayer in the Garden on the night before his crucifixion is a petition which expresses his desires and fears, but the petition ends with the words, "Thy will be done." Petition involves trust in God that His will will be done. What we are really asking is that we may be strong enough to stand no matter what happens. But our standing is not done in any Stoical way; it is not simply gritting our teeth and accepting whatever happens because we feel that whatever happens is inevitable. Rather, it is standing having faith that the will of the loving God is being done even though we cannot understand how it is being done. Petition is dialogue in which we admit our limited and finite view of things, praying that we may be able to accept whatever happens because we know that the view of the loving God is limitless and infinite.

Finally, we must remember that there is a danger in all of this of falling into easy-going Stoicism. It is a great temptation to escape from our problems and to retreat back to the womb in petitionary prayer. Such a retreat saves us from having to use our God-given power and abilities constructively, but such an attitude as this is clearly a sin. We have emphasized in

²D. Z. Phillips, The Concept of Prayer, New York, 1966, 121.

Chapter I that God has endowed man with great powers of reason; He has done so for a reason, for it is through and in man that God brings His will to fruition. It is not enough, therefore, to say "Thy will be done" unless we are willing to make ourselves instruments of that will, unless we are willing to sacrifice ourselves (our time and efforts) so that His will may be done on earth. Petition, then, involves self-giving as well as asking. We ask God to strengthen us and to provide for us that His will may be done in our lives. We pray that He will use our talents, however limited, to make of His world the Kingdom of God. We can see that when our petitions are established in this pattern, there is nothing at all selfish about them. Petition cannot be called the lowest form of prayer if it shares in the very spirit of adoration and self-giving.

Intercession

What we have just said about the relationship between petition and responsible action is equally applicable to our consideration of intercession, our prayers for others and their needs. Indeed, we see in progressing in our study of the types of prayer that the distinctions between types are somewhat superficial, and while they may be useful for purposes of analysis, every one of our prayers should carry elements of each type. Our prayers of intercession must be grounded in the same spirit of humility and trust that we identify with adoration. Furthermore, this type of prayer must be guarded against Stoicism to a greater extent than any

other kind. The danger of which we spoke in considering petition of leaving everything to fate and failing to take any action to better matters is an even greater danger in the area of intercession, for while we may not be content to assign our own lives to fate we may too easily leave others to their fates. It is easier to close our eyes to the needs of our neighbors or to rationalize their misfortunes and needs.

In a day that was less sophisticated scientifically than our own it was believed that the Christian's primary duty toward his neighbor was to pray for him. Magic and other supernatural effects on men were accepted and even expected. If a neighbor was wronged unjustly, God would directly reward him and bring his enemies to destruction. Today, we see that God acts through men, and the evil in the world is not conquered in some supernatural fashion. Rather, it is conquered by men who utilize their talents and have the power of God's love in their hearts. Disease, poverty, and hatred cannot be conquered by our passive prayers, no matter how earnest they may be. The loving concern that moves us to pray must also move us to act. Yet many who call themselves Christians are content only to pray and do not feel impelled to act. Is it any wonder, therefore, that there are many today who condemn prayer as an escape mechanism? It is just that for some people! For example, it would be foolish to pray that the child we see approaching the water's edge might be kept from falling into the water by some supernatural force if we are capable of fetching

the child ourselves from his dangerous position. Yet, if we examine some of our intercessions, we will discover that they are just as foolish.

In Chapter II we discussed the corporate nature of Christian faith and the fact that we are bound by the love of God for all men to love and care for our brothers. It is through us that God works to help them. We have a responsibility to proclaim in our daily lives the "Good News" of God's love. And we do this in giving ourselves to others following the pattern of Jesus whose whole life was a giving of himself to us. In many of the circumstances of life, therefore, our prayer becomes the acts we do out of love grounded in the love of God for us and all men. Our actions become a part of our dialogue with God. Bernard Haring, a great Roman Catholic theologian has expressed intercession as action in this way:

If we regard prayer as a listening and response to God, we will understand morality in terms of responsibility in the fullest sense of the word, namely, listening to God speaking to us in those circumstances of life in which we encounter our neighbor, his love, his needs. Responsibility takes the stuff of life, ourself with its talents and weaknesses, and above all the thou of neighbor and community, and includes all in its response to God. Thus life itself becomes a prayer.³

Listening, it must be pointed out, is a very important part of our dialogue with God. By ourselves we cannot know what action God is calling us to make. We are not capable of doing all of

³Bernard Haring, C.S.S.R., "A Modern Approach to the Ascetical Life," Worship, v. 39, n. 10, 644.

what we know must be done. But if we truly desire to give ourselves, our lives, to God's service, He will point the way of our action. We must listen, not to the voice which would call us to an easier task nor to those who would call us to a task too difficult for us, but we must listen for the voice of God calling within us and directing the way of our action. It will sometimes be difficult to hear His voice above the din of need and the clamor of self, but if we set our heart on hearing Him, He will speak to our heart. We will know that He has spoken to us. And it is only as He speaks to us directing our action that He can speak through us the power and glory of His love.

Intercession, however, is not synonymous with action, even Christian action, for there are situations in which we are powerless to act. The problems are too great for our minds to solve, or it may be physically impossible for us to help. In such circumstances dialogue with God must not stop, for He has the power we do not have. Moreover, His understanding takes all into consideration. In petition in these circumstances we said that we pray that we may be strong enough to bear whatever happens. Intercession in these circumstances combines this prayer with our prayer that those more directly involved will be given the same strength that they may bear it. If we are in contact with the individuals for whom our intercession is meant, we may be able to communicate our trust in God to them. Faith is infectious and we should never underestimate its power to be sensed by others.

When we do not know the why or the how, our faith can be of great comfort to others provided we are sincere and honest in our admission of our dependence on God. In situations where we have no direct contact with the individuals involved we must be content to leave the situation in God's hands, praying that He will through the agency of someone else do what we cannot do.

Intercessory prayer clearly does make a difference to the individual doing the asking, but does it make any difference in God's plan? If we mean by this question to ask if we have any magical power over God, the answer is certainly a negative one. Yet, who can know the mind of God? We know that all of our intercessions and petitions are not answered in the way we would wish, but this is all we can say. We do not know whether our intercessions and petitions have caused God to act in some special way. Yet, anyone who knows God to have acted in his own life will hardly be able to dismiss the possibility that intercession does make a difference. God has, after all, acted in history in unusual ways; the life of Jesus bears abundant witness to this fact. Many people today testify to God's action in their own lives; the Spirit of God has somehow confronted such people in times when nothing less than His Spirit could help. Gert Behanna frequently tells about her days as an alcoholic and of a couple whom she had met only once who prayed regularly for her recovery. When she learned of this, she dismissed their prayers as foolish, but shortly thereafter she experienced the God she had always denied,

and her life was changed. She literally became a new woman; she now spends a great deal of her time traveling around the country speaking to groups about her "conversion." Of course, we may explain her situation in many ways; she firmly believes that the prayers of that couple were instrumental in her "conversion" and rehabilitation. Perhaps they were; perhaps they were not. But in light of the many stories like that of Girt Behanna, I for one would be unable to deny that intercession and petition make a difference in God's plan.

Finally, it is essential that we remember that no matter whether our prayer is expressed in action or in committing the situation to God, that we cannot see things in God's broad spectrum. Only He knows how His will is to be done. Even though we share in establishing His Kingdom, we will not always do the best thing. We may do things we see as important which are not essential to the doing of His will, and we must have faith to accept our own defeats knowing that His battle is being won anyway.

My prayer is not good for God's work in the world because it is good for me, it is good for me because it is good for God's work in the world. Whether its effect will be seen in the particular form to which the prayer has been directed, is something that we must be content not to know. It is not easy to believe that prayer is either always or never "answered" in the way desired. It is possible--indeed necessary--to believe that true Christian prayer is always the service of God.⁴

It is the trust expressed in adoration which enables us to say

⁴Burnaby, op. cit., 233.

with all our hearts, "Thy will be done."

Confession

The groundwork for our consideration of confession has already been laid; in fact, we have said by implication a great deal about confession. It is grounded in the feeling of dependence and is manifested by our frank admittal that we cannot seem to do what we would like to do. We act in this way because we are men; it is of our very nature that we are limited and oftentimes helpless. Douglas Steere in discussing our nature has stated, "that as a creature, man's loving back to God is spasmodic, inconsistent, and anything but continuous, that he requires infinite encouragement, and that there must be countless occasions of restoration to an awareness of the constant action of grace."⁵ Confession is that act in dialogue which makes adoration possible and meaningful. That is, it is only in our recognition, our confession, of our limitedness that we can go on to pray. In confession we recognize our dependence on God.

Yet confession is not simply self-abasement; if it were that, it would have absolutely no advantage. We have seen in recent years that self-abasement in the destructive sense is harmful to man and his society, and this can hardly be pleasing to God. There is no advantage in instilling in men deep senses of guilt; such a project stands clearly in opposition to the message of the Christian Gospel. The message of the Gospel is not one of con-

⁵ Douglas V. Steere, "Common Frontiers in Catholic and Non-Catholic Spirituality," Worship, v. 39, n. 10, 606.

demnation but of acceptance. Jesus, the Righteous One, has made us righteous, and we are not condemned but saved. Yes, we still sin, but God has and does forgive our sin. He has blotted out our sin in the redeeming obedience of His Son. In Baptism we are made members of that redeemed community, that community which can move beyond self-abasement to become partners with God in doing His work. Confession, then, is not a destructive function but a constructive one. In our admissions that we are human we accept our dependence on God. It is our frank admission of our weaknesses in dialogue with God. But it goes beyond this admission of our existential situation to the acceptance of God's forgiveness.

Confession, for the sake of recognizing our limitations, is not very helpful in our struggle to lead a Christian life. Yet, it is in our confession that we come to know that God has forgiven us. His love is so great that he loves us even when we find it hard to love ourselves. We are all rather unlovely, but the unspeakable joy of our relationship to God is that He loves us no matter how unlovely we may be. He has accepted us as we are. Many times we are accepted by men because of what we may become, but God accepts us as we are. His love has no strings attached; His love is in no way dependent on what we deserve. In the final analysis, it is never God who is unable to forgive us, it is only we who are unable to accept His forgiveness.

As we develop our life of prayer, as we continue dialogue with God, it becomes essential that we accept and joy in His for-

givenness. If we allow ourselves to get bogged down in our own feelings of guilt we will never advance anywhere, we will never be able to live the Christian life that He is calling us to live. Having accepted our limitations and failings we must move on through forgiveness to do the real tasks which lay before us. His love and care for us will in no way depend on our faithfulness to Him, but if we will accept His forgiveness He will give us the power to do His will. Confession should be the renewing of our pledge to follow Him more than our admission of our failure to do just that in the past. And we need not be unrealistically optimistic about our abilities to amend our lives radically, for the true spirit of confession is the admission that we are simply unable to make ourselves perfect. There is no point in striving to do that which by our very nature is impossible to do. What we must do is be men, Christian men, despite the limitations that this involves. It is enigmatic but true that God who is perfect entrusts His work in the world into the hands of imperfect men. This is the method which He has chosen to accomplish His work and to bring about His Kingdom; we cannot hope to understand the reasoning behind His decision, all we can do is accept His will gratefully.

On the practical level, then, confession is the frank admission in dialogue that we cannot be perfect and that we have failed to love God and our fellow men as we ought. Furthermore, it is the acceptance of God's forgiveness which alone enables us to go on. Thus, confession is the acceptance of our dependence

on God in all of our acts. Frequent confession has the constructive quality that gives us insight into our nature. It brings us back to earth, so to speak, and it prevents us from establishing ourselves as gods. Without confession doing God's work soon becomes nothing more than doing our own work and when that happens dialogue is impossible and all prayer ceases.

Thanksgiving

Our final classification of prayer is that of thanksgiving. It too has been implied throughout this chapter, and the basis for it was laid in Chapter II. Thanksgiving is simply the climax of our every day dialogue with God. It is implied in the very nature of adoration, for when we adore God we naturally give Him thanks for being as He is. We have seen the place of thanksgiving even more clearly in our discussion of confession. Our primary act of thanks is made in response to the fact of our acceptableness to God in Jesus Christ. Through no merit of our own we are saved and the joy of this Gospel cannot help but inspire thanks. But thanksgiving goes beyond this basic act of thanksgiving to our giving of thanks for the countless personal blessings showered upon us in God's love. Our dialogue, our prayer, is here the expression of thankfulness for the blessings we enjoy. We thank God just as we would the human bearer of a gift. There is, of course, a danger in the human tendency to forget how much we really do owe to God; we too frequently overlook our dependence on Him in time of prosperity. There is always the danger of

fooling ourselves into thinking that we really are self-sufficient, after all. So in thanksgiving as in confession we start with the recognition that we owe what we have to God's mercy and love. It is He who created us, who redeemed us, and He alone sustains us.

One of the weaknesses we must avoid in regard to thanksgiving is the tendency to give thanks only when we feel thankful. It is just as necessary to give thanks when things are not going our way as when they are. Obviously, giving thanks in adverse conditions is difficult, but it need not be done in the spirit of a Pollyanna. It is not the Christian task to delude oneself into thinking that things really are better than they seem. Yet our God has taught us that we are not always capable of recognizing the difference between good and bad. Only He knows what is good in the long run; we cannot understand His ways. But in spite of our limited knowledge, what we do know is that He loves and cares for us and that He is accomplishing His will through us. For this we are bound to give thanks at all times. He is a loving Father to us. When we were children we were not always capable of seeing our parent's actions toward us as a product of love. So it is with the love of the heavenly Father.

We accept our limitations and our dialogue continues. Our response to God continues to be loving thankfulness both for what we understand and what we cannot understand, for our trust in Him is rooted in His love for us.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can see that prayer is not made for God's benefit but for our benefit. In our continual relationship to God, it is prayer which becomes the dialogue which strengthens the relationship. Through talking with and listening for God, the Christian comes to a deeper awareness of his part in God's plan. Our conversation may take different forms, but these forms (as we have seen) can hardly be separated from each other. Every conversation with God contains elements of all five types. Thus, our dialogue, while it has different moods, goes to make our one prayer, our life offered in the service of God. Underhill puts it this way:

Our contemplation and our action, our humble self-opening to God, keeping ourselves sensitive to His music and light, and our generous self-opening to our fellow creatures, keeping ourselves sensitive to their needs, ought to form one life; mediating between God and His world, and bringing the saving power of the Eternal into time.⁶

⁶Underhill, op. cit., 99.

Chapter IV

Our Dialogue in Action - Meditation

We have examined what Christian commitment means, and we have defined prayer as living dialogue with God. We have examined the forms this dialogue takes, and it is now time to turn our attention to the relationship between our actions as committed Christians and our formal acts of prayer. In the last chapter in considering petition and intercession, we maintained that acts of love and mercy are living prayers so long as we recognize that the powers which we manifest are gifts from God. In this consideration of our life as dialogue with God, we have already laid the groundwork for the establishment of unity between action and prayer. But this basic unity goes far beyond the narrow confines of petitionary and intercessory prayer, the two areas in which we have thus far examined the relationship between prayer and action. The unity which is the Christian life combines our acts with all of our prayers in such a way that there can be no dichotomy between prayer and action. It is the thesis of this chapter that even meditation, that type of prayer which has frequently been considered least compatible with action, can in no way be separated from action and remain truly a form of prayer.

If our life is to be a prayer, then we cannot afford to departmentalize life into areas in such a way that only some are compatible with prayer while others are not. The gravest danger to modern spirituality is this unfortunate departmentalization of life in which we separate out the "religious" or "spiritual" elements setting them over against the "secular" elements. The

result of this dichotomy too frequently is that the "religious" element becomes superficial. Our "religious" activities, especially our prayers, are so unrelated to the rest of our life that we must engage in a ceaseless, uphill battle to win for them any place in our daily schedule. We may be more or less successful in establishing for a while certain times to carry on these unrelated spiritual activities, but sooner or later the meaninglessness of this worship causes us (if we are honest with ourselves) to throw it aside. Once we have become discouraged with this type of religious activity we may follow one or more fairly well defined patterns. We may condemn ourselves for our inability to engage successfully in these spiritual exercises, and we may try again and again to make these more relevant or more rewarding; we may try new forms of prayers, we may read new books on the "spiritual life." But as long as the "spiritual life" remains something outside of our regular life, we will be doomed to discouragement and backsliding. New prayers are of no value if they are by their very nature relegated to the sphere of superficiality. Another road which we may take when we become disillusioned with the superficiality of our prayer life is to deny the validity of prayer and worship generally. Sometimes this way does not entail an actual denial of the validity of devotional practices. Instead, all devotional practices are given up in order to engage in more important pursuits. In this way our time is completely taken up with those affairs which we find real to

our situation. Devotional practices are pushed into the back-ground because they are less important, or simply impractical. We may pay them lip service, but they are not really a part of our life. The more honest individual will flatly deny any importance to these practices. Such individuals recognize significance only in their secular affairs and no attempt is made at continuing "religious" practices. The honesty of this position is laudable, but the necessity for it is a tragic by-product of our age's reluctance to rethink ascetical theology. Finally, the road to which our discouragement may lead us is to a new understanding of the "spiritual life" as all of our life touched by the Spirit of God. We may see devotional acts not as a separate part of life, but as the foundation of all our actions and the expressions of our entire life. This awakening to the wholeness of life, this conversion, if you will, becomes real only as the departments of life are gradually dissolved and we act as a unified being. The departments, after all, existed only because we created them; they do not represent reality. Man's body does not house two beings, one spiritual and the other secular. Man is one being in one body which includes those elements which we brand "spiritual" and "secular." These elements are only at war with each other when we try to grant validity to one element and deny the validity of the other. The Christian in the 20th century cannot do this, as we have said. The "secular" is as holy as the "spiritual" and we have an obligation to fulfill both elements of life. Of course,

the primary reason for the warfare between "spiritual" and "secular" is a result of outmoded ideas of the evilness of the world and the supposed separation of God from the world (this division and these ideas have been discussed somewhat in Chapter II). It is only as the spiritual and secular are joined and given validity that we may move on to a consideration of Christian action and meditation. Although we will for a time separate action and meditation in order to examine each, it is essential to remember that in life there is no separation of these elements possible; they are inter-dependent.

Action is the "in" praying of our age. Doing is becoming ever important; the power of man over the forces of his world is being stressed. Man no longer thinks of himself as totally unable to change the evil around him into something good and beautiful. For the committed Christian of today, man is seen as the agent of God to bring about a new and better day through his God-given abilities and talents. This commitment to do the work of God necessarily means commitment to others. Life is a sharing experience in which we, collectively, pool our energies in order to bring about a new day. We have already stressed the corporate nature of our Christian life, and we have seen that modern science and technology has increased the essentiality of corporate responsibility. Specialization of all types has made self-sufficiency an impossibility in our day; corporate action is absolutely necessary. For the non-Christian corporate action is a moral

responsibility because of its practical necessity in this day. This sense of responsibility is heightened for the Christian by his awareness of the relationship between men and God as seen in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. In Jesus' life we see God's acceptance and love of man coupled with man's love and obedience to God; we see our example, and we are presented with the pattern which we must follow if we are to partake together in the work of God, if we are to assist in the establishment of His Kingdom. We see Jesus as "the man for others," and we are called to become this sort of man ourselves. Our life is to be a life of service and self-giving in obedience to God's will. Our life is to be a prayer, to put it very simply.

Yes, action is prayer; it is sacrifice in its truest sense. It is the offering of oneself to do the work of God. In self-giving we become a man for others after the example of Jesus. In light of these things, J. A. T. Robinson has defined prayer in the following way: "Prayer is the responsibility to meet others with all I have, to be ready to encounter the unconditional in the conditional, to expect to meet God in the way, not to turn aside from the way."¹ Prayer is responsibility manifested in care for and action in the world, for the world is the only place where we can meet God. The greatest Christian writers in all ages have clearly recognized this fact.

The "spiritual life," as it is frequently called by older

¹ John A. T. Robinson, Honest to God, Philadelphia, 1963, 100.

works, is not an escape into our own selfish enjoyment of God or from facing the world as it really exists. Rather, it is the living of life to its fullest, guided by the hand of God. "Being, not wanting, having and doing is the essence of the spiritual life."² In Bonhoeffer's terms this is being a man, being a man for others. The "spiritual life," therefore, is the highest and most gratifying life; it is life at its highest peak; it is total, faithful self-giving. It is the life of commitment and trust. Unfortunately, the popular idea of the "spiritual life" is a life of withdrawal from the world, and this popular idea is so well established that it has caused modern Christians to give up using the phrase "spiritual life" in order to be understood properly. So misunderstood is this phrase that it is probably to our advantage to see it pass. But, it should be remembered that the modern equivalents to the "spiritual life," such phrases as: "coming of age," "living the fulness of life," etc., are frequently misunderstood as well. In Chapter I we spoke of the danger of indentifying the Christian life with life as interpreted by modern humanists. Christian life is not just life, it is a life of trust and commitment to a power higher than ourselves. It is for this reason that we must guard against the tendency today to try to identify all action with prayer. To be sure all action may be done prayerfully, but in now way is the inherent nature of action synonymous with prayer. Many who are indeed acting in all the modern social move-

²Underhill, op. cit., 24.

ments are not living a life of prayer despite their true devotion to others. To put it simply, the motive of our actions is very important. The Christian motivation must be love of others grounded in a loving trust in God. Love of others because of what they may become in a new society is not enough; we must love them because of what they already are, namely, the objects of God's love. It is only as we live life to the fullest trusting in God and loving our neighbors because of this trust that our life and all our actions become prayers. Life is a dialogue with God, a dialogue carried on in word and in action.

As was mentioned in the last chapter, we must always be on guard against that sloth which may tempt us to employ verbal prayer at times when our acting prayers are really more necessary. Actions are frequently our best prayers in that they are usually more demanding. The real test of concern is willingness to act, willingness to really do all in our power to change the situation. There are few things more tragic than the sin of our hypocrisy committed in our verbal prayers. We rationalize and content our consciences by praying that God will do something to remedy a situation, when all the time it is clear that we are called to be God's agents to bring about the desired remedy. We have not loved enough. Christian love and trust demands that we give ourselves fully, and this will mean getting hurt at times. But this is the price we pay for coming of age, and it is a fairly small price to pay when considered against the peace and joy that trust of God impart.

Action as prayer is no easier than any other formal type of praying, and we must consider what action is demanded of us as Christians. We have said that we are called to follow the pattern of Jesus, but there is a great deal of misunderstanding about what following him entails. One thing is clear, we are not called to do what Jesus did in any detailed way: "We are not called to be itinerant preachers, with disciples, dying a criminal's death at the end. We are called to live in our own world, according to our gifts, skills, and opportunities as politicians and housewives and plumbers."³ In other words, Jesus had a particular mission to which he was called and which he alone could fulfill. The work that we are being called to do must take place in the regular contexts of our own lives according to our abilities and opportunities. We do our own work, but we do it in the spirit of Jesus. The example we follow is his example of self-giving, but the manifestations this self-giving takes are necessarily our own. Our action must also be based on what Jesus through Scripture tells us our action should be, namely, love which culminates in acts of mercy. Steere alludes to this in the following passage: "True ascetic theology in all ages has not been blind to the spiritual direction that Jesus gives all his future followers in the closing portion of the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, and that Francis of Assisi confirmed in the love that he lavished on the inmates

³Farley, op. cit., 35.

of the leper hutch at Rivo Toro."⁴ We must see the needy and the hungry and the desolate with our own eyes and we must manifest our love in our own way. No one can give us an easy guide to our life's work: we must individually figure out what action is proper for us to do. Emotion is only one guide, and unfortunately it is not always the best guide to determine the nature of our action. Sincere thought and long hours of pondering are necessary if we are to fulfill the will of God in our lives. This brings us to a consideration of meditation and contemplation, the reverse side of our action coin.

Meditation and contemplation come under the general heading of "mental prayer." "Mental prayer," like "spiritual life," is a term which is undergoing radical re-evaluation in our present day. It used to be held (and still is held, unfortunately, by some) that mental prayer was aimed at getting away from the mundane matters of life to contemplate God in His glory. Knox gives us a fairly typical, traditional interpretation of mental prayer in the following: "Mental prayer consists of all acts of prayer and worship in which the soul is raised to God by the use of formal trains of reasoning or by the activity of the affections and the will: it is irrelevant whether our minds formulate these thoughts into words or not."⁵ I have included this passage primarily to demonstrate the danger in the twentieth century posed

⁴Steere, op. cit., 617.

⁵Wilfred L. Knox, Meditation and Mental Prayer, London, 1960, 3.

by such an interpretation of mental prayer. The author's concern for the irrelevance of words in mental prayer pales in the light of the irrelevance of this whole way of thinking for modern man. That reasoning and the affections play a part in prayer is about all we can salvage from this definition. Mental prayer is, as the very name implies, concerned with the intellect; it is involved with our thinking and pondering. But simply because it is involved with thinking does not mean that it is disengaged from our life and actions. In no other sphere is our thinking expected to abandon life as it really is, and there is no reason to create this dichotomy between thinking and the rest of our activities in the sphere of religious consciousness. The fact of the matter is, all our thinking is conditioned by our sense perceptions, our language, our habits, and a number of other forces derived from the world in which we live. There is no point in talking about contemplation of God as He really is, for what we know of God is entirely a result of His manifestation of Himself to us in the world. We see God's action only in the world, and it is no accident that the greatest manifestation of God is seen in the person of a man, Jesus. God acts within the sphere of human capabilities; He acts in men in the world, and it is only as He does so that we can have any knowledge of Him.

In succinct terms, the world is the medium in which we see God. This is the medium we are called to contemplate. We cannot come to know God in disassociation from the world, for he is pre-

sent to us only there. Yet, we may look at the world and not see Him; He is not there to be perceived by our senses. To see Him one must meditate on the world, on life in general. Underneath it all we may perceive God. This is why Robinson says, "The 'matter' of prayer is supplied by the world—this is why too rarified an atmosphere may be harder to pray in as it is to breathe in."⁶ We have seen in our discussion of the types of prayer that the world does provide us with our subjects for intercessions, petitions, and alike, but we cannot afford to underestimate the prime place the world plays in our knowledge and contemplation of God. The older idea of prayer imagined that one first had to know God through contemplation and only after this was accomplished could man know how to act in the world. Man's primary responsibility was seen as loving God, and it was only after loving Him that we could go on to love our neighbors.

There developed the notion of neighbor as secondary, as simply receiving the fruits of contemplation. This idea of contemplation goes against the grain of modern man who is more deeply attracted to his power and responsibility for building the earth. In addition, modern biblical studies have brought out so clearly the central place of love of neighbor in the New Testament that it is almost impossible for a conscientious Christian to accept contemplation under the aspect of withdrawal from the world as an obstacle to God, the way in which it has so often been presented in the textbooks of spiritual life, if not in the writings of the mystics themselves.⁷

⁶ Robinson, op. cit., 101.

⁷ DeFerrari, op. cit., 49.

We see our relationship to God not simply in concentrating on God, but in seeing and evaluating our own potential and our own part in His creation. Furthermore, we know that another basis of our knowledge is to be found in Scripture, and Scripture attest to God's action in people in the world. We no longer see knowledge as something passed directly from object to subject. Our knowledge is dependent on other people, on our environment, on our hereditary abilities, and on our experiences. Self-development is quite impossible without inter-personal relationships. Furthermore, it is only as we develop our own personality and our inter-personal relationships with other people that we can come to know our relationship with God.

It used to be believed that it was only as we knew and loved God that we could know and love our neighbor, but the reverse is much more generally accepted today. It is as we experience human love that we come to know the love of God and to love Him. It is by human forgiveness that we come to know God's forgiveness. We meet God in the world in the lives of others, and this is why our meditations must begin in the world and with the world. "One enters into relationships with other men, and it is God himself who responds. Almost as if by some law of the mysterious reciprocity of relationships God waited for us to be witnesses and representatives of his own paternity. And this is where charity and prayer converge: far from opposing each other, they evoke each other

and mutually save one another."⁸ Prayer and action do evoke each other, but we must go even further than this in our assertion of their relationship. They are mutually dependent on each other to such a degree that one is impossible without the other: "Prayer is not simply an activity side by side with charity but an inner constituent of it. Prayer would not be prayer without charity and charity would not be charity without prayer."⁹ We cannot know what our task in the world is without meditating upon the world in which we find ourselves. We cannot know we are doing God's work until we meet Him in the world and see Him at work there.

At this point, perhaps, we should say something about the place of biblical materials in our meditations, for it has been classically held that meditation begins in contemplating the life of Jesus or other passages from the Old and New Testaments. To be sure, modern meditation must draw on biblical material, but it does not begin with that material. "Contemporary forms of meditation begin with man rather than God, with the world rather than the biblical world, with my life rather than Jesus' life."¹⁰ For us, the biblical materials are useful in interpreting what is going on around us, but they cannot suffice alone to impart knowledge and understanding of the world or of God. The theater of God's action for us is not the first century A. D. or the sixth

⁸Bro, op. cit., 135.

⁹DeFerrari, op. cit., 52.

¹⁰Coburn, "Contemporary Non-Catholic...", op. cit., 627.

century B. C. but the 20th century. We must use biblical materials in order to give our century its proper continuity with the past, and we must come to a knowledge of God's love for the world in Jesus of Nazareth through the Gospel narratives. But we must see the biblical accounts through the present world, just as we see distant planets only with the aid of a telescope. The 20th century serves as our telescope to see the past. We have already said that it is only as we experience human love that we can know God's love, and it is only through our experience in the world that we can hope to understand the implications of Jesus' life and ministry. Only as we live life as he lived it can we establish any affinity with him, and we must share with him the experiences of life if we are to see through him to his Father. Only in this way does his Father become our Father.

Of course, we must avoid separating too radically our world and the biblical accounts as communicating mediums of knowledge of God. They are not such that we can speak of a real priority of one over the other; rather, they are interdependent. Life takes on meaning because of what is attested to in Scripture, just as Scripture becomes knowable in any deep sense only as we live life and learn through it. It is not enough to read Scripture and to meditate upon it unless our meditation begins and ends in our own world. That is, we must always take the biblical passage's message and meditate upon it as it applies to our own life and world. Or we must meditate on the conditions of our world, com-

mitting them to the care of the loving God attested to in Scripture. Or we may meditate on our world in order to see our place in it as responsible Christians; our Christian duty is stated in Scripture, but the way in which that duty is performed depends on the situation in which we find ourselves. In any case, the Christian life is mutually dependent on knowledge of the world and knowledge of Scripture.

Because of the discovery of the important part played by environment in all our knowing, there has in recent years been a great deal of criticism of the Ignatian method of meditation. This form of meditation begins by taking a biblical passage and imagining in vivid detail the scene depicted. The meditation is supposed to be applied to the individual's life, but this method makes incorporation of the meditation into the present rather difficult. Ignatius lived in a day when biblical criticism was almost unknown, and one reason why his method loses its appeal to modern man is because we cannot look so uncritically at Scripture. Furthermore, this system of imagining scenes in the lives of men in an age two thousand years removed from our own fails to incorporate us and our world into the meditation. In his famous book on prayer, C. S. Lewis makes the following comment on the Ignatian method: "If I started with a 'compositio loci' I should never reach the meditation. The picture would go on elaborating itself indefinitely and becoming every moment of less spiritual relevance."¹¹

¹¹C. S. Lewis, Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer, London, 1964, 112.

There may have been a need for formal imagining in Ignatius' day, but our age is quite different. If anything, modern man suffers from over-imagination and not the lack thereof. Scripture becomes relevant for us as we see its message in the world all around us, not as we vividly imagine past events.

Modern meditations begin with the everyday experiences of life, and the senses are employed to the fullest degree, not repressed. Our senses gather the data on which we can meditate, in which we can come face to face with God. The tragedies of life are committed to God's care; life's joys are shared with Him; direction is sought from Him. Nothing is too small to warrant our attention or to enter our conversation with God. The dialogue takes place wherever we are and no matter what is our mood. Several recent publications demonstrate this kind of meditation. Two of the most popular are Are You Running With Me Jesus? by Malcolm Boyd, and Prayers by Michel Quoist. The second is the better of the two because the experiences meditated upon are more common, and the scope of the meditations is wider. To try to review either Quoist's or Boyd's book or to analyze their method would fail to do justice to the content. These books must be prayed! Therefore, I refer the reader to them for this purpose. And for the purpose of this paper I will quote only one of Quoist's prayers to demonstrate the style and content. The prayer, "Green Blackboards," speaks for itself:

The school is up-to-date.
 Proudly the Principal enumerates all the improvements.
 The finest discovery, Lord, is the green blackboards
 The scientists have studied the matter at length,
 they have made experiments;
 We now know that green is the ideal color, that it
 doesn't tire the eyes, that it is quieting and
 relaxing.
 It has occured to me, Lord, that You didn't wait so
 long to paint the trees and the meadows green.
 Your research laboratories were efficient, and in
 order not to tire,us, You perfected a number of
 shades of green for your modern meadows.
 And so the "finds" of men consist in discovering
 what you have thought from time immemorial.
 Thank you, Lord, for being the good Father who
 gives his children the joy of discovering by
 themselves the treasure of his intelligence and
 love.
 But keep us from believing that by ourselves we have
 invented anything at all.¹²

This type of continual consciousness of our relationship to God
 is the essence of modern prayer at its best. Life is a continuous
 conversation with God. Just as we pointed out that the particular-
 ity of our actions will depend on our talents and abilities, so
 too our meditations will take an individualistic form. All that
 is necessary is that these meditations remain a true part of our-
 selves. The conversation must be our conversation.

Finally, I should like to accentuate the point that medita-
 tion on the world's condition does bring some people to a Chris-
 tian awareness, and many more would fall into this category if
 more Christians were meditating in the right way. The non-Chris-
 tian who manifests energy in the social movements of the day is
 manifesting the same kind of energy as his Christian co-worker.

¹²Michel Quoist, Prayers, trans. Agnes M. Forsyth & Anne Marie de
 Commaille, New York, 1963, 20.

Real contact is made between the Christian and the non-Christian on the level of action for the betterment of the world, and this is an encouraging thing. David Jenkins has pointed out that the church has a task to communicate to the non-Christian on the level of his energy for human betterment, for this energy is akin to the Christian's energy: "It is spiritual energy which they are developing. And we have to see how this sort of energy gets you on to the dimensions which raise questions of grace and worship and the whole matter of transcendence, mystery and the dimension of God."¹³ Obviously, the Christian church will never meet this challenge with philosophical rationalization no matter how true these may be. The only way the church can meet this challenge is in the lives of dedicated Christians who are involved in and in love with the world. Through the lives of these Christians others may recognize within themselves the Spirit of God at work. We have said in a number of contexts that we meet God in the lives of other men. This is a great moral responsibility for the Christian, but he does not fulfill his obligation by merely talking about his faith. This obligation is fulfilled only by living as a Christian in the world, and by acting responsibly. Fortunately, this necessity has been recognized by the greatest saints in all ages. It is heartening to discover these passages in the little book by Colliander which bases its discussion of prayer on the writings of the early Fathers of the Greek Church:

Prayer is action; to pray is to be highly effective. (pg. 71).

¹³Jenkins, op. cit., 6.

The working material of the praying person is living humanity. By his prayers he shapes it, gives it pregnancy and beauty: first himself and thereby many others. (73) Through work he increases his faith (Luke 17:5), through prayer he gets strength to work. Thus work and prayer live closely together, until they flow together and become one. His work becomes to pray, and his prayer is his work.¹⁴

¹⁴Tito Colliander, The Way of The Ascetics, trans. Katherine Ferré, New York, 1960, 105-106.

Chapter V

Discipline - The Backbone of Life and Prayer

In our discussion of meditation and work in the last chapter we said that one simply must take time out of his busy daily activity to ponder what he is doing and where he is going. Only when this is done conscientiously can work be called prayer. We have defined prayer as man's life-dialogue with God, and we have said that this dialogue is born of commitment, commitment to do the work of God. commitment is not an act which we can make once for all time and then forget about it. Rather, it is an act we must make again and again throughout our life. Only in recommitment can our life become a dialogue with God, a prayer. Obviously, this recommitment can occur only in a framework of discipline, and it is discipline in life and in prayer which we must now consider. I have saved this topic for last for a number of reasons. First, it is that element of prayer least attractive to the modern mind. Among the reasons for this, I am sure, is the fact that specific rules of life and formal sets of prayers have too often been held up as absolute necessities for lives of prayer. These have been seen as ends in themselves rather than means to an end. Secondly, this is an area where there must be a great deal of individual freedom. Too often glittering generalities have been made about discipline in prayer. Finally, I have saved this consideration until last because it is only as we have some idea where we want to go that the means we choose can become meaningful. We have talked about prayer as a life-dialogue; this is the goal of our prayer life. Now we must talk a little more about how this goal can be

realized in our lives.

To want one's life to be a prayer, while it is the first step toward that goal, is only one of many steps which must be taken if our life is to become a prayer. Unfortunately, one cannot wake up some morning and decide that his life is going to be a prayer and forever after live a prayer. Prayer, like any other skill in life takes practice. The child does not decide he is going to walk and proceed directly to do so. Before walking becomes automatic, there must be many slips and falls. Only after a technique has been mastered does walking become automatic. So it is with prayer. We are not automatically in dialogue with God; it is only as we remain conscious of who He is and who we are in relationship to Him that a lasting dialogue ensues. Only as we develop the practice of looking for His hand will we see it at work in our world and in our lives. We have seen that work becomes prayer only when it is offered up consciously to God. All of life becomes prayer only as we offer every moment in dialogue to God. He then enters every moment of our life.

As we look at those whose lives can truly be called prayers, we inevitably discover that these people all went through a period of life in which they engaged in a rule of formal prayer. They usually experienced difficulties in keeping such rules of life, but they were able to make all life a prayer only with the help of such rules. These rules helped them to develop a consciousness of God, without which dialogue would be impossible. Some never

give up a formal rule of prayer, although they usually modify it from time to time to fit with their particular needs. Some do reach a point where formal prayer plays little or no part in their prayer lives. Such people have become expert in making all of life their prayer. This would appear to be the case of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the last years of his life. His whole life had become so much a prayer that he could talk of "religionless Christianity." What he wrote in his last years has had a profound influence on all of modern Christian theology. Many have taken his words and turned them against all formal religious practices, forgetting that the author of these words in earlier years wrote Life Together, a little book which lays great stress on formal religious practices. Bonhoeffer's words can be turned against some types of formal prayer, but let us not forget that in one of his last letters he asks a friend to keep him in his prayers, "don't forget to pray for me- I'm sure you don't!"¹ Obviously, Bonhoeffer had not given up belief in the necessity of formal acts of prayer. Furthermore, it would appear that his own freedom in prayer had been made possible only because of his many years of structural praying. Bonhoeffer's words about freedom in prayer and about all of life as a prayer are very popular among many who have never subjected themselves to a disciplined prayer life. What such people do not realize is that one cannot just pick up where Bonhoeffer left off. One must first experience some of the same things which enabled

¹Bonhoeffer, op. cit., August 23, 1944.

Bonhoeffer to become free, which enabled him to make his life a prayer. We may learn from Bonhoeffer and other saints how to avoid some of the pit-falls of formal praying, but we cannot skip over the formal stage of prayer entirely; we have to pass through it ourselves.

In Chapter I we discussed the immaturity of thinking that twentieth century man is fully "come of age." In that chapter, we spoke about the unpopularity of authority figures and the fact that freedom is too often conceived of today as being completely free of formal structures. The same naive attitude about freedom can be seen in much of what is said about prayer today. People expect to make all of life a prayer without having to work at it. Unfortunately, it just is not that easy. Before lasting dialogue between man and God can be established, man must go through some formal channels. Each individual must impose upon himself certain formal requirements so that dialogue can become habitual and not just employed in times of panic and despair. Unless we impose upon ourselves some discipline in prayer, we will never develop a consciousness of God in all of life. It is necessary for every individual to adopt certain formal practices to assure growth in prayer. On this matter, I know of no better consideration than the one given by Douglas Steere in the following paragraph:

These practices of self-examination, meditation, mental prayer, swift ejaculation, confession, abstinence, simplicity, spiritual reading, then, are all based upon the nature of the mental and bodily mechanisms and are devices for doing three things:

(1) The first object is to keep the vegetative rhythm of the animal and secular life from closing its circuit and absorbing the person so exclusively within its toils as to cut him off from response to a deeper order of which the vegetative cycle is only an aspect....(2) The second object of these devices is daily to cut down the tree of self-aggrandizement that grows up in our souls and blots out the sight of other men and of God. (3) The third object is to center the full powers of men—their senses, their habits, their bodies, as well as their minds, upon God and His love that it may speak to their condition. In other words these exercises seek to take men to God—and to leave them there.²

Formal acts of prayer and meditation are based in the desire to bring us face to face with God, to remind us that we are dependent on Him, and to remind us that it is only through Him that we can become that person we long to become. They are designed to pull us out of the little world of self-concern and to place us in the larger world of God's action.

Of course, there is a great danger if these formal practices are thought to be the end of prayer. Far too many people start their life of prayer with formal (usually written) prayers and never advance beyond that stage. More honest individuals in this situation usually give up prayers entirely after a while, so dreary has their prayer life become. How sad it is to see the painful struggling of these individuals to "make a silk purse out of a sow's ear." Prayer can never be a stagnant experience; it must change; it must try new forms. Moreover, our life of prayer must advance from the more basic forms to higher forms, to freer forms.

² Douglas V. Steere, On Beginning from Within, New York, 1964, 92-93.

For a time, we may require an extremely formal structure in our prayer life. We may have to set aside specific times in each day to say certain formal, written prayers. As time goes on, however, we should free ourselves from as many of the written prayers as possible. Prayer should become more spontaneous; our own words and thoughts will become more important than the written prayers we used to use. If we find that our consciousness of God is such that we think of Him and pray to Him throughout our daily activity, we may give up the formal times of prayer that used to be necessary. Above all, it must be remembered, formal prayer is designed to create in us God-consciousness. Any formal prayer which gets in the way of this goal should be dropped. When we notice that God-consciousness is developing when we are not saying formal prayers, this is our cue to examine our formal structure to see where we may make it less formal. Very few people ever reach the stage where no formal prayer is required, so we should be very cautious of any temptation to do away with all our formal prayers. There is a great temptation to do away with our formal prayers because they are demanding; they demand obedience, time, and a great deal of effort. To abandon formal prayer for the sake of convenience is to miss the boat entirely. Like most of the rest of life, we have to work for what we get. God-consciousness does not come easily. It requires long and hard work, but if it is what we truly want in life we will be willing to work for it.

The formal aspects of our prayer life, Steere has called

"creative obedience."³ This is an excellent term to describe what we have been discussing, because these formal acts are done in obedience (we subject ourselves to a higher authority), and their aim is to create something new in our lives. Steere points out that not only are formal prayers and times for prayer necessary, we must also make times for creative silence. "There is no increasing of the pure seed of the spiritual life that does not call for both initial and frequent returns to an island of silence.... Living as we do in this kind of climate of dispersion, withdrawal, going apart, retirement, and being alone become no longer an option but an imperative to anyone who would enter and grow in the Christian life."⁴ Needless to say, these times of silence cannot be just rest; they must be creative moments of silence. They must be times set aside to think seriously about our life and about our relationship to God and to our fellow men. "They are times of looking ahead to life-situations, to rehearse beforehand so that when the time comes one is not caught unaware.... Prayer of reflection is a time of deepening my attitude of acceptance, appreciation, and openness toward neighbor, of sharpening my sensitivity, lest our 'Thous' become as so many 'Its.'"⁵ Constructive silence forces us to look at our world as it really is; it forces us to see ourselves as we really are. This can be a

³Ibid., Ch. III.

⁴Ibid., 100-101; 102.

⁵Grace Marie Schutte, S.Sp.S., "Reflections on Prayer and Worldly Holiness," Worship, v. 41, n. 2, Frb., 1967.

frightening experience, for what we see may not be at all attractive. Yet, it is only when we see things as they really are that we can make progress in life. Periods of silence are necessary if we are going to be able to give our life direction; they, like our formal prayers, are designed to lead us on to new phases in our life of prayer. Having recognized our shortcomings, we can go on to correct them; we can go on to try again. For this task the ancients give us this word of encouragement: "Do not let yourself be frightened by the hardness of your heart. Prayer will gradually soften it."⁶

In any consideration of formal prayer and prayer time the most difficult problem to deal with is how much time should be spent on formal prayers and what formal prayers should be employed. One of the greatest weaknesses of many of the older rules of life and discussions of prayer is that they tend to treat everyone the same when it comes to a consideration of formal prayer. They are prone to suggest a given amount of time in which everyone is expected to use certain, prescribed forms of prayer. While these suggestions may have been suited for a time when individual differences were not so marked as they are today, they are hardly suitable in an age of specialization. Psychologists increasingly point out the differences between men; as an animal, we have evolved in such a way that what is best for any given individual may not be best for any other individual. In the matter of prayer

⁶ Colliander, op. cit., 76.

life, men must necessarily develop patterns that will be well suited to their own particular needs, habits, interests, and capabilities.

"A person does not exist like a piece of wood, a tree or a house which is determined by place, size and age. In order that a person may really speak out of itself, be present and 'exist,' it must do something with itself: it must acquire itself, take hold of itself, actuate itself. Only then does man 'exist' in the full sense of the word. This 'existence,' which is the opposite of merely being present, is man's sole prerogative as a personal being."⁷ If our life is going to be well integrated, we will have to stand outside ourselves to see ourselves as others see us. This is one of the reasons why silence and meditation are so important to man. We can, of course, go through life never seeing ourselves as we really are, but if we choose so to do, we must necessarily give up all hope of ever fulfilling our highest goals. "As a personal being man is confronted with a task. It is his task to realize his existence. To do this, it is necessary that he should wake up to his real nature, be wrenched out of the security and solidity of his everyday routine and attain to his own reality."⁸ We can know what our prayer life should be like only as we know ourselves. It is our dialogue with God, and it must for this reason be a true part of us. On the basis

⁷ Josef Goldbrunner, Cure of Mind and Cure of Soul, Notre Dame, Ind., 1963, 18.

⁸ Ibid., 19.

of what we know about ourselves we can decide what formal prayers will best suit us.

There is no use in setting down hard and fast rules about formal prayer; any approach which does not consider the individual differences of people is doomed to failure. "We should each of us discover, with sufficient detail, what is the form of prayer to which God appears to call us; let us give ample room and opportunity to this particular form; but let us also organize, most carefully, a certain regular amount of the other kinds of prayer and worship."⁹ We may discover, as many have discovered in this day of busy activity, that ejaculatory prayer is that type of formal prayer for which we are best suited. We must be careful, however, not to completely abandon other types of prayer. Our ejaculations should be balanced off against set times during our week for meditation, for example. The dangers in only carrying on one kind of formal prayer are many: we can never be entirely certain that what appears to be our special kind of prayer is that kind to which we are really being called; growth in prayer is essential, so new forms should be tried; we may escape from facing reality (either in our world or in ourselves) if we only engage in one kind of prayer. We will want to be free enough to try new forms of prayer and to experiment.

Individuality in our types of prayer must necessarily carry over to our methods for meditation. In Chapter IV we talked only

⁹Baron Fredrich vonHugel, The Life of Prayer, New York, 1929, 45-46.

about the basic presuppositions for meditation. The method, frequency, and time of our meditations will have to be a personal matter. All lives need some contemplation; some will need considerably more than will others, however. The amount of time needed for reflection and contemplation may depend on the type of activity around which our life is centered. "A person who by occupation is already spending much time in reflection each day (the scholar, student, professor, or writer) should need less time for withdrawal than a person differently engaged."¹⁰ It used to be held that priests and seminarians should spend more time in contemplation than the average person, but even this kind of generalization cannot be made; it may be that these individuals should spend less time in meditation than should the person whose occupation is manual rather than intellectual. Contemplation must be incorporated into life, and it must begin where we are in our life. Beyond this general assertion we can say very little which will apply to every individual.

This contemplative worship which is a lifting of the heart of man to join the rhythm of praise and gratitude and rejoicing and yearning that runs through the whole invisible sweep of creation is as unquenchable as it is inclusive. Self-justifying, self-vindicating it would seem to have neither beginning nor end but to be a movement that will go on eternally: differently channeled, differently interpreted, differently grasped in all that it requires of the worshipper, yet with a universal lift in man that ever keeps him from closing the circle around

¹⁰ Schutte, op. cit., 113.

either himself or his own creations.¹¹

So much of our daily formal prayer becomes dreary and lifeless, and some of the reason for this may be the result of unrealistic expectations on our parts. All of the great Christian ascetics speak of periods in which prayer is especially difficult because it does not seem to be accomplishing anything. In the twentieth century when we are constantly under pressure to produce, it is especially hard to cope with the dry periods of our prayer life. We tend to think of our prayers in terms of what we are getting out of them. If we persist in thinking of prayer in this way, we will find it quite impossible to make our lives into prayers. Formal prayer can never be measured by what we seem to be getting out of it at a particular moment in time. First, we can not always see at the time what benefit our prayers may be doing. Second, and of far more importance, our formal prayers are not ends in themselves; they are merely means of opening up dialogue with God so that we may understand and do what He would have us do. To continuously test our formal prayers is to treat them as ends rather than means. Formal prayers may seem to be getting us nowhere, but they are opening up dialogue with God. We may have to wait a long time before we hear God's voice speaking to our heart, but we continue speaking to Him in faith that He will in time speak to us. This attitude can be seen in the following meditation by Rahner:

¹¹ Douglas V. Steere, Work and Contemplation, New York, 1957, 122.

This, then, is the ultimate meaning of my daily prayers, this awful waiting. It's not what I feel or think of in them, nor the resolutions I make, nor any superficial activity of my mind and will that you find pleasing in my prayer. All that is only the fulfillment of a command and, at the same time, the free gift of your grace. All this is only clearing the ground, so the soul will be ready for that precious moment when you offer it the possibility of losing itself in the finding of you, of praying itself into you. ¹²

Our formal prayers are our means of praying ourselves into God, praying ourselves into his creating plan. He will show us the way if we order our lives in such a way that we can recognize His way when we come upon it. Without some formal discipline, we can never hope to recognize His way.

Our formal prayers are the discipline which alone can lead to an understanding of both ourselves and of God. "Man prays to God whom he does not understand, a fact which to a large extent reflects the nature of prayer, namely, telling God what one does not understand. On the other hand, in the very telling, the confession of his own insufficiency, the believer reaches an understanding of himself, he 'comes to himself.'" ¹³ The two parties of our prayer dialogue must be understood by us, and one of the primary ways in which we come to understand both ourselves and God is through the formal acts of prayer and meditation which we make in our lives.

Finally, we should say a word about "religious feelings."

¹² Rahner, "Encounters...", op. cit., 25.

¹³ Phillips, op. cit., 61.

Those who evaluate the moment-by-moment process of their formal prayers tend to do so on the basis of how they feel at the time. When prayers fail to bring instant joy, such people become dejected. We have pointed out the danger in considering these prayers as ends in themselves; there is equal danger in judging prayer on the basis of our feelings. Our relationship with God can never be measured by feelings. Yes, there will be times of great joy in prayer, but there will be other times when all prayer is tedious and even maddening. We cannot say that our prayers which bring joy are better prayers; all we can say is that we enjoy them more. God is present with us at all times, and we are in dialogue with Him just as much when we are sad as when we are happy. There is a great danger in over-stressing the part our emotions should play in prayer. "If 'my feelings' and 'my experiences' are the goal of the Christian life, then the real object of my concern is not God, but myself."¹⁴ Again, it must be stressed that prayer is not easy. The reward which prayer brings is not a reward to our emotions; its reward goes far deeper than that. C. S. Lewis is quite right when he says: "I have a notion that what seem our worst prayers may really be, in God's eyes, our best. Those, I mean, which are least supported by devotional feeling and contend with the greatest disinclination. For these, perhaps, being nearly all will, come from a deeper level than feeling."¹⁵

¹⁴Farley, op. cit., 53.

¹⁵Lewis, op. cit., 149.

Like the rest of Christian living, prayer places great demands upon the individual. If we are praying with the expectation of some reward, we might just as well give up. The reward has already been given in Jesus, the Christ. Our life is not a means whereby we make ourselves acceptable to Him. The Christian life is a response to this love of God seen in His acceptance of us. Our response is likely to cost us a great deal, but, then again, no one is forcing us to respond. The decision is ours. The Christian life, the life of prayer, is a life which begins and ends in gratitude; gratitude does not set a price or count the cost.

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